

CHAPTER II

MACAULAY'S CONCEPTION OF HISTORY

THE immediate popularity of Macaulay's History was partly due to its subject and partly due to the moment when it appeared. But there was a novelty about Macaulay's treatment of the subject which was a still greater factor in the success of his book. Something in the conception of history which it embodied and something in the way in which it was written, appealed to those whom other historians had failed to interest. From the first he proclaimed that he was an innovator and announced that he sought to reach the largest possible circle of readers. He has clearly explained for us both his aim and his method ; we are not obliged to deduce them from the pages of his History. In his essays, his letters, and his journals, Macaulay sets forth his views about his art, gives us his estimates of other historians, and points out their merits and their defects. Evidently he had reflected on the theory of historical writing before he began to practise it, and all the time that he was composing he was endeavouring to realise an ideal which he had before his mind. His method of treatment, in so far as it differed from that adopted by other historians, was the result of a deliberate choice—he thought he saw more clearly than they did, what a historian ought to aim at achieving, and how that aim could

be attained.

A passage in Macaulay's journal for 1849
proves this :

' There is merit, no doubt, in Hume,
Robertson, Voltaire,